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ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes a conversational episode from a study of children's play in an educational setting to demonstrate conversational analysis as a research methodology. The analysis reveals the interactional means by which a dramatic play sequence is orchestrated. Children are seen to be sophisticated in their use of talk to create and shape the evolving social world. Further, the paper discusses the value of conversational analysis to the study of children's behavior and early childhood education. The realities of classroom life may negate the use of conversational analysis by practitioners, but collaborative research utilizing the method may provide a basis for reflection on habitual practices. A transcription key and conversational data are appended. (Author/RH)

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TOWARD AN UNDERSTANDING OF CHILDREN'S PLAY
A CONVERSATIONAL ANALYSIS APPROACH

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UNDERSTANDING PLAY THROUGH CONVERSATIONAL ANALYSIS

Abstract

A recent inquiry into children's play in an educational setting generates reflection upon the use of a particular interpretive paradigm in classroom research (Ditchburn, 1985). The present paper utilizes a conversational episode from the data base of this inquiry to demonstrate conversational analysis as a methodology. The analysis of the conversational episode chosen documents the interactional means by which a dramatic play sequence is orchestrated. Children are seen to be sophisticated in their use of talk to create and shape the evolving social world. Further, the paper discusses the value of the particular methodological lens, conversational analysis, in the study of children's behaviour and early childhood education. The realities of classroom life may negate practitioner use of conversational analysis. However, collaborative research approaches utilizing this methodology may provide the necessary insight to generate a reflective view of habitual practice such that understanding is enhanced.

Historically, early childhood educators have advocated learning through play as a warranted educational strategy. The theoretical underpinnings for play are various and inconclusive empirical justification is available in the literature. The study of young children's play is compounded by the complexity of its operational and theoretical parameters. Further, the varied theoretical approaches to play present a fragmented view of what is presumably a complex and integrated process for the child.

The most prevalent attempt to examine children's play has been through inquiry within the research traditions of the natural sciences. Social science research has borrowed liberally from these research paradigms in which objects are viewed as stable, discrete and permanent and where causal relationships are sought. Inherent problems for the social sciences are apparent. Social science constructs cannot escape the essential indexicality of the social world. Different textures of meaning are derived in different contexts. Further, social 'objects' cannot be observed or quantified directly. Indicators must be designated for these unobservable attributes.

As Cicourel (1972) discusses, it is unclear how members orient to such attributes nor how these attributes constitute social action. In utilizing social constructs, then, social scientists may confound resource and topic as their action is embedded in a commonsense view of a stable social world. The use of quantification procedures necessitating codification systematically distorts the features of

interest. As a result, "sociology has become alienated from the social" (Mehan and Wood, 1975, p. 63).

In an attempt to overcome these perceived deficiencies field studies have been undertaken. Such studies present rich and perceptive accounts. Readers feel immersed in the actual situation with a resulting sense of experiential actuality. The dilemma from a scientific perspective is that it is unclear how representative such accounts may be. Thus, paradigms are sought which bridge these two disparate worlds of research tradition.

Corsaro and Tomlinson's (1980) definition of spontaneous play as the "continual practice of reality production" projects the theoretical and operational parameters of the present discussion (p. 105). An ethnomethodological conceptualization of a contingent social reality constituted by the reasoning practices of participants frames the methodological lens to be explored in this paper. At issue are children's practices, the conversational means by which their reality is created and sustained.

The present discussion explicates the use of conversational analysis as a methodological approach to the study of young children's dramatic play. The data base is a transcript of children's dramatic play recorded in the house centre of an Early Childhood Services classroom. The transcript is taken from a recent study of the interactional structure of children's dramatic play and the evaluation strategies typically utilized by early childhood educators (Ditchburn, 1985). In the present paper one conversational episode is analyzed to

demonstrate the value of conversational analysis as a research tool. The interest resides in play as it is socially organized and available for analysis in those utterances by which it is constituted.

Conversational Analysis as Methodology

Conversational analysis is concerned with the means by which talk accomplishes social action. For example, Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974) identify turn-taking design as the basic feature of conversation, a universal property which is both context-free and context-sensitive. By assuming a turn-at-talk each speaker elects to partake in the social action embodied in the conversation. Each utterance constitutes an action. Conversational analysis examines the systematic management of talk, specifically the retrospective and prospective impact of any one turn-at-talk. That is to say, the placement of any turn-at-talk is criterial to its understanding.

In their discussion of the mechanics of turn-taking, Sacks et al. (1974) demonstrate two properties of conversation: the recurrence of speaker alteration and the fact that only one speaker speaks in any given turn at talk. Participants observably orient to these properties as violation is both noticed and addressed. The principles of turn taking design exemplify the ethnomethodological conception of the social world as an interactional negotiation while providing access to the study of this process as it is sequentially constituted. Of interest is how such orderly, sequential activity is achieved. These principles are not mere analytic constructs for codifying data. Evidence for their utilization by participants lies in the data itself. An example from

the conversational episode used as data in this paper serves to illustrate this claim. Two children, Je and Jo, are engaged in a telephone conversation.

69. Je: Hi, what are you doing tomorrow?

70. Jo: Tomorrow, I have a party.

The claim that Je's utterance is a question is warranted by Jo's response in the subsequent turn. Analytic constructs, then, are those of the conversationalists.

Conversational structures, for example the adjacency pair, reveal the structure of the social world and the means by which it is structured. The previous example illustrates one type of adjacency pair, the question-answer sequence. The adjacency pair exhibits the following design specifics: two utterance length where each is generated by a different speaker, and adjacent parts which are conditionally relevant where each depends for its meaning and characterization on the positioning of its pair. The design specifics of talk provide a display of the speaker's intention and meaning to the hearer and in so doing provide analytical access and justification. Further, talk is socially organized as seen in the distribution of turns (Sacks, et al. 1974). Conversational analysis, then, reveals the social order as it is achieved interactionally. The normative order is a continuous process of mutual interpretation. To accomplish the social order participants must closely monitor the sequence of utterances. In sum, meaning is a continuous negotiation of participants empirically available to the analyst in the conversational data.

The focus is natural language and its constituitive practices; in the present discussion, the natural language practices utilized by children in a dramatic play sequence. As the prospective analysis reveals, the social organization of children's talk is a rich source for research.

The Social Organization of Children's Play.

The present interest in play stems from a desire to reveal the subjective understandings by which children conduct their social action, a search to understand the understanding of children (Hawkins, 1974). Play occasions the child's social world. Conversational analysis provides empirical access to the children's reality yielding an interpretive understanding. The child is viewed as a history-making participant, in Denzin's (1982) words, the "teller and doer of his own story" (p. 39). Play is conceptualized as the interactive means by which children create their social world as a situated phenomenon.

Even a cursory acquaintance with children's dramatic play reveals the use of recurring themes or scripts. A conceptualization of script or contextual frame is employed by sociolinguists and cognitive scientists (Nelson, 1978). Script is seen as a cognitive construction, constituting an interpretive frame within which action proceeds (Frederiksen, 1981). The conceptualization of script, action plan or frame is increasingly invoked in the literature related to young children's experiences (Garvey 1977; Frederiksen, 1981; Corsaro, 1983). Nelson and Grundel (1979) define script as "a conceptual structure that describes appropriate sequences of events in a particular context" (p. 78). Script is viewed as a heuristic construct to explain the

importance and role of background knowledge, particularly in routine events. Garvey (1977) has documented recurrent scripts or action plans utilized by children in their play. She hypothesizes that such plans are situationally realized as opposed to being reproduced from previous activities. Scripts provide coherence and serve to maintain topical talk (Nelson and Seidman, 1984). The interactional means by which a script is utilized is typically neglected. Inquiry into the mutual assembly of scripts is required, an empirical documentation of the means by which participants hearably orient to the script as it is reciprocally created (see Corsaro, 1983, for a similar discussion).

Procedural Details and Issues

The setting for the data collection from which the conversational episode to be analyzed in this paper is taken is an Early Childhood Services classroom. Early Childhood Services is the provincially funded educational program for five-year-old children in Alberta. The children's program is but one dimension of a coordinated service encompassing staff, parents, and children. The program is based on a philosophy designed to enhance the dignity and self-worth of the child. Readers are referred to two provincial documents for further information about Early Childhood Services: Philosophy, Goals, and Program Dimensions, Alberta Education, 1984, and Operational Plans for Early Childhood Services, Alberta Education, 1973.

In E.C.S. programs children are encouraged to direct their own learning. The classroom environment reflects this pedagogical approach. The role of the teacher is to provide a variety of opportunities for

focussed encounters with significant learning experiences. Assumptions about the young child's development are reflected in the physical and affective attributes of the environment. Many classrooms are partitioned into a number of different learning areas or learning centres where the chosen materials reflect content areas and the educational needs of the children. An underlying structure guides the selection of materials. This structure, while unnoticed by the children or casual observer, states the tentative progression of content and ensures that learning is never left to chance.

The conversational episode presented is a fragment taken from video and audio recordings made between October, 1983, and June, 1984. Despite the use of a very sensitive microphone, capturing children's play is difficult given the range of activities in close proximity in an E.C.S. classroom. Recording quality would be enhanced by using cordless microphones attached to each child. However, this strategy was not utilized given the decision to be as unintrusive as possible in respect for the significant experience underway.

Initial transcription was achieved using audio tapes. These initial transcripts were checked by recourse to the video recordings. The transcription process ensures a thorough 'reading' of the children's talk. Despite the time demands involved the pace of the process recasts the familiar world of classroom discourse as an unexplored territory. In this way, the unexplicated structure by which commonsense knowledge and tacit assumptions frame analysis is countered at least to some extent.

Transcription protocols selected are indicated in the Appendix. It should be noted that pauses indicated, as for example, (2) in the transcript, are approximate. They have not been accurately timed. As well, there is no consistent attempt to capture non-linguistic or prosodic events. Brief descriptive accounts accompany the transcript together with occasional references to non-verbal language. However, these descriptions and references are merely those available to any competent observer.

In the classroom in question the house centre was equipped with a table and four chairs, kitchen appliances, a stove and refrigerator, a cupboard and sink. In the kitchen cupboards were utensils, pots and pans, dishes and cutlery. As well, there were dress-up clothes hung in closets in one section of the 'house', two toy telephones mounted on these cupboards, and a variety of soft toys and cushions. The centre was located in one corner of the classroom, well-lit by natural light, and adjacent to the block centre. The children were given no specific directions for their involvement in this area, at least in the encounters which constitute the data. They self-selected this centre, moved directly to it, and began their dramatic play.

A fine-grained analysis of the data was undertaken to reveal recurrent patterns. The data suggested and revealed those design specifics by which the talk is assembled. These properties of the talk informed the analysis as it proceeded. As indicated, the methodology utilized was conversational analysis revealing the systematic management of the conversation, in this case, the unfolding social action of the

children's play in a classroom setting. The social action as it is constituted utterance by utterance is always problematic for participants. An understanding of the meaning which the social action holds for participants resides in an analysis of the design specifics of the data as these are oriented to by the subjects. Interpretation must be judged by its adequacy and is always subject to an alternative account. To this end, the data, video tapes and transcripts, are available for examination.

The present research seeks to enhance the understanding of children. Adults experience an inherent difficulty in viewing the child's world as though through the eyes of the child. However, the methodology chosen allows empirical access to the child's reality as this is assembled sequentially in the talk. The interest in play is partly a response to an abiding curiosity about the ease with which children embrace play activities and their intense absorption as they create their reality. Within an educational setting, however, accountability is demanded. That learning through play remains a contentious issue reinforces the claim that its interactional structure requires empirical investigation.

Research Notes

As noted, the transcript provided in the Appendix is a dramatic play sequence recorded in the house centre of the E.C.S. classroom. In attempting to unravel the social action created by the children through their talk, the research act proceeds through several stages.

Stage A - Transcription

The transcript is prepared from audio tapes and checked by reference to the video recording. This process is lengthy involving several complete checks where each demand frequent pauses to rewind and review a previous section. Brief descriptive accounts are included in the form of an intermittent commentary clarifying possible ambiguity. Given the children's movement, identification is sometimes problematic. Recourse to voice identification is helpful at times.

Stage B- Open horizon examination

The transcript is studied and those features of possible analytic interest are noted as detailed below. Such features reflect the attention to the question, how is the play interactionally structured? Familiarity with the sequence resulting from the transcription process provides a background of knowledge within which the gross features to be discussed are apparent. Further, this step of the research act reveals that the written discourse of the transcript is infused with features of this background knowledge including non-linguistic and prosodic attributes. The extent to which such scenic features impinge upon that which is claimed as hearable in the transcript cannot be measured in any universal sense. However, it is clearly of importance. This recognition leads to a questioning of the extent to which these paralinguistic features have an impact upon the interpretation. Nevertheless, claims to adequate interpretation are open to scrutiny as the analysis itself and the transcripts included provide avenues for

challenge and alternate interpretation. This is a strength inherent in the methodology.

A number of features of the data which generate questions of possible analytic interest follow.

. Telephone sequences recur. The children move from one area of the house centre to the toy telephones where conversations occur.

. The play seems to be thematically structured, for example, a birthday party, Mr. T, telephone conversations, 'cops and robbers,' bus rides, home activity - e.g., sleeping. Of interest then, is the interactional structure of these apparent themes. Several questions present themselves including that of the significance of Mr. T. As well, food and cooking seem to act as integrative symbols in weaving disjoint themes together posing the question as to how this is hearable.

. Mi's moves in utterances 136, 158, 177 are noted, e.g., "Do we have to go home now?"/ Are we on the bus?" Do such questions provide access to the play by ensuring or negotiating collaboration? (c.f. Keenan and Schieffelin's (1976) discussion of the use of the definite article as denoting a shared stock of knowledge).

. Repeats and reformulations are massively present. Do these provide or negotiate access or seek collaboration? Self and other repeats are apparent. How is this characterization hearable?

. Je seems to be a conciliator. How is this hearable?

. How do children resolve conflicts? How are these hearable? What may be said to constitute conflict?

Stage C - Focussed examination

At this stage the transcript is examined after specifically reviewing the research questions which gave direction to the broad research project and those additional questions which have emerged from an earlier analysis (Ditchburn, 1985). This activity is not pursued in any greater detail for it proved not to be productive. A decision is made to proceed with the analysis guided by the questions raised in Stage B. As will be apparent in the following discussion, Stage D, this decision proved to be fortuitous. Allowing the grossly apparent features of the social action to direct the subsequent analysis lends a focus which facilitates access to the children's interactional strategies.

Stage D - Conversational analysis

One part only of the analysis undertaken during Stage D will be described here. However, it is illustrative of the process. During this stage frequent recourse is made to the video tape where visual cues may serve to underscore a tentative interpretation or clarify the action constituted in and through the children's talk. This stage of the research act is cyclical in nature. Initial questions focus the inquiry which, in turn, generate additional questions or modify previous ones.

For the present purpose, the conversational episode from Transcript 2P characterized as the birthday party sequence is examined in detail. The analysis seeks the interactional means by which the theme is orchestrated. The examination of the sequential

implicativeness of those utterances in which the cake is a 'mentionable' reveals the design specifics whereby shared meaning is achieved. The analysis centres upon how the theme is created, sustained, and concluded as hearable in the talk itself. The relevant fragment is replicated to aid the reader. The complete transcript of the play episode is provided in the Appendix.

As the action opens E and Je are in the kitchen area of the house centre. Jo is initially on the periphery. E and Jo are boys, Je is a girl.

56. Je I have to make something, not you.
57. E I'm busy. You can ?
58. Je ?
59. E I'm busy, too.
60. Je Go to your own place.
61. E I'm busy! (3)
62. Je I'm making a cake.
63. E ? I'm making a cake for Jo's birthday.
64. Je I know. (2)
65. E It's a strawberry cake. ?
66. Je I've got a strawberry ?
67. E I know.
68. Jo Je, I'm calling you, B-ring, b-ring.
69. Je Hi, what are you doing tomorrow?
70. Jo Tomorrow, I have a party.
71. Je Can I come?

72. Jo Sure, we're just going to tell you, O.K.?

73. Je O.K. Bye.

74. Jo Better set up. Today's my party.

75. E Yeah. Let's make a party.

76. Jo We're having a party (?)

77. Je I'm bringing over a cake.

78. Jo Just a minute, move, move, move. I'm making a cake. Move, move, I'm making a cake. (chants)

79. E No, this is Je's cake.

80. Je That's my cake, just a minutes. Thank you.

81. Jo I need to make the cake!

82. Je This is my cake (laughs). Pretend we don't know we all made it (laughs). Here's a cake, another cake. Here's another cake.

83. Jo You haven't come to my house yet. Here's the cake. (2) You haven't go to my house. How you going to give this ? (2) (Jo takes cake to table)

84. E He needs it! Jo needs it! (E. at stove with Je points to Jo at table)

85. Je I'm making (Je and E. at stove)

86. E Jo needs it! Jo needs it!

87. Jo How, here's some (at cupboard)

88. Je B-ring, [ding de dong]

89. E [Don't, don't use those, don't. (E and Jo at cupboard.

Je moves to periphery and makes a door bell chime sound.)

90. Jo We're using this for the party. (E. hits Jo on head.)

91. Je Hi, Jo.

92. E Don't.

93. Je I brought a cake and something.

94. Jo I've brought a cake, too.

95. ? He got a cake.

96. Je Oh, take this lid off. Take the lid off. Take this lid off.

97. Jo I need some more, I need one, two more.

98. Je Jo, take the lid off and you'll see something just for you. But, it's your present and you're not supposed to open it.

99. Jo This is for

100. Je Don't open this lid. (2)

101. Jo You're having a party, E.

102. E No.

103. Jo O.K., here, you can only have one. (Jo passes something to E.)

104. Je Are we, um, going to, um, open the presents?

105. Jo No, it's not a birthday. It's just a little party. (2) Oh, I'll have a cake. Here's my cake ? (3)

106. E Excuse me. Come on, tea's coming. Here's some tea. (E goes to stove and brings kettle to table._

107. Jo Thanks, E. Hey don't ? Some milk ? (stirring noises

at stove).

108. Je Put it here. (Holds saucepan) (5)

109. E ? In a 'frigerator.'

110. Je Here's some, here's something. I'll just have to get that spoon. I'll give it all to ? There it's stirred up ?. I made some soup.

111. Jo Oh, no, just need a little knife. A cook's knife.

112. Je And for dessert there's cake.

113, Mi Oh good

114. Je In just a minute.

115. ? ?

116. Je I just have to take this cake away.

117. Mi And it will be cooking, (2) will be cooking. (Mi and Je go to stove. E and Jo at table, cutting)

118. Jo Oh good. One more (2).

119. Je Almost ready, Jo. (?) Here's yours. And there's yours. And then. (2) Everybody eat their soup. Eat your soup. (2) (Je hands out bowls and serves soup.)

120. Jo? It's good.

121. ? (Inaudible several voices.)

122. Je Put it in the oven.

123. E O.K.

124. Je And there's something cooking in the oven, too. (E and Je move to the oven.)

125. E ? it's in the oven (8) Oh no, the bell's ringing. I'll

turn it off. There's the cake. (E goes to stove and returns with cake.)

126. Je (laughs) I'm ?

127. E There's the dessert, there's the dessert.

128. Mi Guess what?

129. Je Here's

130. Jo Good, we have to wash them off.

131. E No more cake.

132. Jo You have to wash all of them. You have to wash. You have to wash all of them. (Jo takes dishes to sink).

133. Je I'm eating my cake (laughs). (3) I have to go.

134. Jo O.K. Go home. Bye.

135. Je Bye. (kitchen noises)

As this sequence opens Je and E are in the kitchen area of the house centre. Jo utilizes a telephone call to gain access to the play, utterance 68. Interestingly, in utterance 69, Je violates standard turn-taking procedure in telephone conversations by moving directly to open the conversation by stating, "Hi, what are you doing tomorrow?", before Jo announces his identity (c.f. Schegloff, 1968). No doubt her violation does not constitute a trouble source because Jo has stated in the previous turn that he is calling her. Jo's reply, utterance 70, is of particular interest given the theme of the play sequence. He states, "Tomorrow, I have a party", suggesting perhaps, that he has heard E's statement, utterance 63, "? I'm making a cake for Jo's birthday". If this is so, then Jo's turn is

topically relevant and serves to provide access to the ongoing play. Further, Jo is seen to use time to advantage. By his turn in 74, "tomorrow" has become "today". In declaring, "Today's my party", Jo takes control of both the present and of the action which will build the ongoing present, utterance by utterance.

An alternate explanation for Jo's move from the future, "tomorrow", to the present, "today", may be seen in Je's turn at 69. As caller Jo has the right to initiate the topic of the phone call. The summons-answer sequence, a specific instance of an adjacency pair, organizes collaborative access and provides for what Schegloff (1968: 102) terms 'non-terminability' of the conversation. A summons ensures the speaker a further turn at talk upon completion of the adjacency pair, an extension of the power of the adjacency pair as a tying mechanism in talk. Je, however, assumes the role of the summoner when she acknowledges the summons, "Hi", and then follows with a question within the same turn "...what are you doing tomorrow?", thereby initiating the topic of the call. Jo, attempting to reclaim his responsibility as summoner, uses a partial repeat, "Tomorrow, I have a party", to initiate his topic. The use of "tomorrow" may be semantically inconsequential, a means of repair in Je's apparent breach in turn-taking construction.

As the action unfolds Jo intervenes again seeking access to a particular aspect of the action. In 78, he announces, "Just a minute, move, move, move. I'm making a cake...". In response to protests from E and Je who are already engaged in cakemaking, Jo

reiterates, "I need to make the cake". With this turn Jo's initial move into the play via the telephone gains an added dimension.

By announcing his party in 70, "Tomorrow, I have a party", and further in 74, "Better set up. Today's my party", Jo declares ownership of the action, thereby seeking control. Conflict looms, to be averted temporarily by Je's conciliatory action in 82. She relieves the tension by her laughter and by providing a face-saving alternative,"...Pretend we don't know we all made it (laughs). Here's a cake, another cake. Here's another cake.". Nevertheless, the two boys, E and Jo, are not to be easily diverted. The tension builds to the point at which E hits Jo on the head, utterance 90. Je again resorts to a diversionary tactic, moving to the 'door', ringing the 'bell', and announcing her arrival in utterance 91, "Hi, Jo", and further, with the tantalizing suggestion of a present in utterance 98.

Throughout this sequence control of the play is negotiated via ownership of the cake. It is not clear why the children apparently invest such importance in the cake. Prior to Jo's entrance, E and Je parry about cakemaking. At 62, Je claims her right to the stove with, "I'm making a cake", countered by E who is not only making a cake, but one "for Jo's birthday". Je retaliates, with "I know". Presumably, E cannot assume the upperhand if he cannot catch Je unaware. E turns the tables on Je with a repeat move in 67, claiming with poetic justice, "I know". Again, in 77, Je attempts to control the action with her assertion, "I'm bringing over the cake", leading

to a dispute as to whom may claim ownership. Jo then utilizes a devious move by denying that Je has, in fact, arrived at his house.

In that participants in play activities move easily between the real and fantasy worlds, Je's presence at the stove with Jo apparently does not constitute arrival at his house. Je retreats and tries a new tack. She 'rings' the door bell, announces her arrival and states, "I brought a cake and something.". Jo assumes his turn countering, "I've brought a cake, too.". Je diverts attention by referring to presents in turn 98 and 104. The conflict is unresolved, however, and Jo redefines the occasion as "just a little party" followed by a two-second silence. The chance to assume a turn as indicated by the silence is not taken. So, unchallenged, Jo demonstrates his upperhand declaring, "Oh, I'll have a cake. Here's my cake ? (3)". The action moves forward as E prepares and serves tea. Despite this lull, it is only a small retreat while Je finds a new strategy. She makes soup and announces in 112, "And for dessert there's cake.". Jo's cake is taken away and the play continues in a collaborative fashion with the inclusion of another boy, Mi. The dessert is cooked, served and eaten. Finally, Je moves to close the thematic play with her announcement at 133, "I'm eating my cake. (laughs) (3). I have to go.". Presumably, she knows that she can have her cake and eat it too! The three-second pause passes without the insertion of a challenge.

Thus, the cake symbolizes the negotiation of participation rights. Why this symbol is so important to the children is

problematic. An examination of those utterances where the cake is a referent provides a clue to the puzzle. Je initiates cake making as a topic in 62, "I'm making a cake.". The utterance follows a series of utterances where Je and E are heard to vie for kitchen space and supplies. E counters in 63 by stating"...I'm making a cake for Jo's birthday", and in 65 "It's a strawberry cake ?. The next references to the cake occur in the sequence 77-82.

77. Je I'm bringing over a cake.

78. Jo Just a minutes, move, move, move. I'm making a cake. Move, move, I'm making a cake (chants).

79. E No, this is Je's cake.

80. Je That's my cake, just a minute. Thank you.

81. Jo I need to make the cake.

82. Je This is my cake (laughs). Pretend we don't know we all made it (laughs). Here's a cake, another cake. Here's another cake.

83. Jo You haven't come to my house yet. Here's the cake (2). You haven't go to my house. How you going to give this ?

In this sequence a heated debate ensues as to ownership of the cake. Moreover, ownership of the cake is coterminous with access to limited working space in the kitchen area. It is this area which Je and E were disputing at the opening of this sequence. Thus, both ownership of the cake and the kitchen space appear to be the issue.

Of interest is the particular use of pronouns in referring to the cake. As previously asserted, the cake is frequently associated

with ownership. It is "my cake" or the cake that "I'm bringing/ making". The use of personal pronouns gives emphasis underscoring the importance of the cake in the participation structure of the children's play.

Frequent reference to the cake by both Je and Jo are associated with ownership of the action in question. For example, in utterances 77, 82, and 93, Je is bringing or providing the cake, her access to the predominant vector of activity. Jo's utterances 81, 83, 94 and 105 serve to assert his ownership of the cake by engaging in its preparation or provision to his co-participants. E collaborates with Je reinforcing her claim to ownership, utterances 79 and 125, after a brief dispute with Je early in the episode. Jo's references to the cake are embedded in his claims to the physical space in which the action unfolds. Initially, the space is defined by Jo as his house reinforced by Je as she gains entry by ringing the door bell. Jo's final reference to his cake occurs in the utterance in which the party is "not a birthday" but "just a little party", utterance 105. Social identity reflexively structures and is itself structured by the thematic organization of the play. Social identity as specifying what a member is doing, in the present episode 'having a party' or 'providing a cake', reflexively negotiates the thematic structure as a situational accomplishment.

The significance of the cake resides in its use as a means of controlling the social action, a contextual device whereby the children utilize various interactional means to achieve a dominant

position. In this episode the situational negotiation of power is evident. One clue to the importance of the cake as a symbol of power may relate to the common classroom practice whereby the child celebrating a birthday provides a birthday treat, usually a cake, for the class. On such occasions, the child celebrating the birthday assumes a particular eminence as he cuts the cake, and distributes pieces to classmates. Thus, the child who supplies and distributes the cake occupies an envied position.

By isolating those utterances in which the topic of the party is explicitly formulated, 70, 74, 75, 76, 90, 101, 105, some interesting patterns emerge. The initial reference to the party occurs in Jo's statement, utterance 70, "Tomorrow, I have a party.". In 74 the party is still Jo's party becoming a party in the next two turns. The party now becomes the context whereby the ongoing dispute about cake making is negotiated. This dispute becomes intelligible in Jo's utterances at 101 and 105. First, he states that E is having a party then that it is not a birthday party. The responsibility for cake making is somehow linked to the status of the party. Apparently, for Jo, a party at his house gives him the right to prepare the food, whereas a party, defined as Jo's birthday party, gives guests the right to prepare the food.

The analysis yields the artfulness of the children's conversational negotiations. The cake and the party are contextual symbols by which the children negotiate the participation structure of their action. As such the cake and the party provide

conversational access in the negotiation of the interactional structure, delicately orchestrated by the participants to achieve their conversational ends. The latter include access to desired roles, physical space, and topic. The import of the cake in particular is evident in those interactive design mechanisms utilized in which it is a referent. Analysis illuminates its use in the utterance by utterance sequencing of the talk, within repeats and reformulations, and in the allocation of turns. Reference to the cake seems to be significant in topical organization and in identity negotiation, particularly as symbolizing the participation structure in negotiated relationships. As the referent signals an imaginary cake, its embeddedness in the ongoing talk lends credence to its strength as a contextual symbol revealed by and revealing the participation structure.

Concluding Remarks

The foregoing discussion of the research as a reflexively unfolding act is necessarily a gloss. A phenomenological record would portray in precise detail all those influences which impact the assembly of the interpretive account. However, while the discussion cannot be considered precise, it does provide a mirror on the research act.

A potential problem related to the nature of the subjects presents itself. The present interpretive account is circumscribed by membership in the adult world. The world of the child may indeed constitute an alternate reality in Schutz' (1962) sense. An example serves to underscore the implications of this problem. An initial

interpretation of one child's action, (T), in another play sequence cast her as a socially incompetent, failing to achieve a desired role as waitress in the play. In a general sense, adults make the assumption that children share our taken-for-granted world. Subsequent analysis, however, provided clarification. T evidences a different conceptualization of the role of a restaurant cook than the normative view allows. Once this realization was secured, T's seeming inadequacy was interpreted as a legitimate move in a role-appropriate sense. This example serves to underscore the strength of conversational analysis in ensuring congruity in the perspectives of the analyst and participants (Mehan, 1978).

In sum, the methodology chosen in the present study is rigorous, based in an accurate conceptualization of its subject matter, the experiential essence of everyday life, and presented such that its claims may be subject to verification or alternate interpretation. Nevertheless, despite intensive efforts to present a rigorous, empirically based analysis, claims cannot be warranted by traditional standards of empiricism. As Lightfoot (1978) states, "It is not a matter of choosing one sociohistorical interpretation...rather, it is a matter of recognizing the multiple visions as pieces of an immensely complex narrative" (p. 186).

The foregoing analysis has served to document the use of conversational analysis in interpreting children's play. Clearly children are sophisticated language users as they assemble their social world. The analysis provides access to a world which is

glimpsed only dimly and fleetingly in the midst of the intricate flow of classroom life. The reality of the teacher's world means that indepth analysis of classroom events by practitioners is unrealistic. However, collaborative partnerships between teachers and researchers address this problem. Teachers involved in the study from which the present discussion has evolved confirmed that the analysis illuminated their world generating a new perspective, a "reflection-in-practice" in Schon's (1982) terms. While no claims are made as to replicability, the reflective behaviour generated provides a sense of a shared reality, shared among the children, teachers and analyst alike. It is from this shared base, reinforcing the richness and complexity of the classroom, that understanding is enhanced.

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Appendix

Transcription Key

( ) Pause - interior number indicates approximate time in seconds.

[Overlap of two or more utterances.

? Inaudible utterance.

(?) Problematic word or words.

Transcript

1. Jo Oh, sorry. (4)
2. E O.K., here come the ?
3. Te Here Mi, please come this way here.
4. Jo We want some tea.
5. E There.
6. Jo Thank you.
7. Je Let's move the table over.
8. E Oopsy ?
9. Te Here's another chair, Michael. (3)
10. E For me? ?
11. Jo No, one here and one here.
12. Je Who's going to, we have to move the table over.
13. Jo No.
14. Je Yes. I need this chair here.
15. E Hey, Bear (holds stuffed bear).
16. Je Anyway, this is a house.
17. Mi Yeah, this is a (2)
18. Je Hey, E, sit there.
19. Jo Hey, E, this don't come up. This is stuck.
20. Te Excuse me, E, whose hat is this?
21. Mi I don't have a knife. (2)
22. E You have no knife? O.K., I'll go get one for you. (2)
23. Je Why are you taping it?

24. Te I just don't want anyone to trip on that, that's all. It kind of sticks up a little.

25. Jo I can't cut this up. (2)

26. E You can eat it.

27. Jo I can't cut this up.

28. Je You can't eat the leaves.

29. Mi Pretend ?

30. Jo Oh, this is hard, E.

31. ? ? Cut it out ? I'm trying.

32. Jo Let me use the spoon. (Singing) It doesn't work. (2) Here, let me have it. (4) (Jo leaves table)

33. E I cut it. (4) (Sound off) Listen, I cut it see. (E leaves table and returns)

34. Je I know how to cut it.

35. Jo Oh, thanks. Give me it.

36. E I need it. It's mine. (Jo climbs on chairs to his place.)

37. Mi Carefully climbing on the chairs, O.K.?

38. Jo Let me have that spoon.

39. E (Laughs) she cut it off. Oh, she cut it off.

40. Mi Want me to take that off? (Picture off briefly).

41. ? E!

42. E You stay here. ? (to M) (E moves to M and pushes him towards the table.)

43. Mi I don't want ?

44. Jo Thanks, bye. (Jo and Je get up from table.)

45. Je Bye. (waves)

46. Jo After I drank my ? Bye.

47. Je I have to make, I have to make some pie.

48. E ? (They're going to wash) (?)

49. Je They're not sharing. Tell to Mrs. I you can't.

50. Mi D'you know what E's doing? He's taking off my hat.

51. (Inaudible, several voices.)

52. Je It's all clean right? (2)

53. ? Bye, Je.

54. Je I need some more cups. Can you please give me the milk (4) No, no, no, no, no, E! I need them. (E put utensils in the cupboard.)

55. E I'll have another one. Two of them. (13) (E moves to stove with Je. Jo consults telephone book. Mi watches.)

56. Je I have to make something, not you.

57. E I'm busy. You can ?

58. Je ?

59. E I'm busy, too.

60. Je Go to your own place.

61. E I'm busy (3)

62. Je I'm making a cake.

63. E ? I'm making a cake for Jo's birthday.

64. Je I know. (2)

65. E It's a strawberry cake. ?

66. Je I've got a strawberry ?

67. E I know.

68. Jo Je, I'm calling you. B-ring, b-ring.

69. Je Hi, what are you doing tomorrow?

70. Jo Tomorrow, I have a party.

71. Je Can I come?

72. Jo Sure, we're just going to tell you, O.K.?

73. Je O.K. Bye.

74. Jo Better set up. Today's my party.

76. Jo We're having a party (?)

77. Je I'm bringing over a cake.

78. Jo Just a minute, move, move, move. I'm making a cake, Move, move, I'm making a cake. (chants)

79. E No, this is Je's cake.

80. Je That's my cake, just a minute. Thank you.

81. Jo I need to make the cake!

82. Je This is my cake (laughs). Pretend we don't know we all made it (laughs). Here's a cake, another cake. Here's another cake.

83. Jo You haven't come to my house yet. Here's the cake. (2) You haven't go to my house. How you going to give this ? (2) (Jo takes cake to table)

84. E He needs it! Jo needs it! (E at stove with Je points to Jo at table)

85. Je I'm making (Je and E at stove)

86. E Jo needs it! Jo needs it!

87. Jo How, here's some (at cupboard)

88. Je B-ring, [ding de dong

89. E [Don't, don't use those, don't. (E and Jo at cupboard. Je moves to periphery and makes a door bell chime sound.)

90. Jo We're using this for the party. (E hits Jo on head.)

91. Je Hi, Jo.

92. E Don't.

93. Je I brought a cake and something.

94. Jo I've brought a cake, too.

95. ? He got a cake.

96. Je Oh, take this lid off. Take the lid off. Take this lid off.

97. Jo I need some more, I need, one, two more.

98. Je Jo, take the lid off and you'll see something just for you. But it's your present and you're not supposed to open it.

99. Jo This is for

100. Je Don't open this lid. (2)

101. Jo You're having a party, E.

102. E No.

103. Jo O.K., here, you can only have one. (Jo passes something to E.)

104. Je Are we, um, going to, um, open the presents?

105. Jo No, it's not a birthday. It's just a little party. (2) Oh, I'll have a cake. Here's my cake ? (3)

106. E Excuse me. Come on, tea's coming. Here's some tea. (E goes to stove and brings kettle to table.)

107. Jo Thanks, E. Hey don't ? Some milk ? (stirring noises at stove).

108. Je Put it in here. (Holds saucepan) (5)

109. E ? In a 'frigerator.'

110. Je Here's some, here's something. I'll just have to get that spoon. And I'll give it all to ? There it's stirred up ? I made some soup.

111. Jo Oh, no, just need a little knife. A cook's knife.

112. Je And for dessert there's [cake.

113. Mi? [Oh, good.

114. Je In just a minute.

115. ? ?

116. Je I just have to take this cake away.

117. Mi And it will be cooking, (2) will be cooking. (Mi and Je go to stove. E and Jo at table, cutting)

118. Jo Oh, good. One more (2).

119. Je Almost ready, Jo. (?) Here's yours. And there's yours. And then. (2) Everybody eat their soup. Eat your soup. (2) (Je hands out bowls and serves soup.)

120. Jo? It's good.

121. ? (Inaudible several voices.)

122. Je Put it in the oven.

123. E O.K.

124. Je And there's something cooking in the oven, too. (E and Je move to the oven.)

125. E ? it's in the oven (8) Oh no, the bell's ringing. I'll turn it off. There's the cake. (E goes to stove and returns with cake.)

126. Je (laughs) I'm ?

127. E There's the dessert, there's the dessert.

128. Mi Guess what

129. Je Here's

130. Jo Good, we have to wash them off.

131. E No more cake.

132. Jo You have to wash all of them. You have to wash. You have to wash all of them. (Jo takes dishes to sink.)

133. Je I'm eating my cake (laughs) (3) I have to go.

134. Jo O.K. Go home. Bye.

135. Je Bye. (kitchen noises)

136. Mi Do we have to go home now?

137. Jo O.K., Bye. Set up rig[illegible] here, set up table. (2) No, I'll wash this, Mi. (3)

138. Mi O.K., I'll be in ?

139. Je I'll be in ? too.

140. Jo Then, E. E is the cook, O.K.? You are the cooker. He's

the cooker. (J, Je, and Mi move to back of house.)

141. ? ? (Kitchen noises, giggles.)

142. Jo E, I'm phoning to you. 2, 8, I better sit, 2, 8, 9, 2, 4, 0, 1. E, I'm phoning to you. No, I'm phoning to E. (Je picks up phone) Can I speak to E, please?

143. Je Yes.

144. Jo Hi, what are you doing?

145. E Oh, I'm cooking. I'm busy.

146. Jo Oh, um, are you going to have a party? Maybe I, I can come?

147. E O.K.

148. Jo Bye.

149. E Bye.

150. Jo Have to vacuum, vacuum.

151. Mi Let's go, we're going to go soon.

152. Je He's, he's in my house.

153. Jo Look at, look at this ?

154. Je You better ?

155. Jo I better vacuum. Clean the house. I better vacuum, E.

156. E No, don't ? don't.

157. Jo I'm vacuuming ?

158. Mi Are we on the bus? Are we on the bus? (4)

159. Je We're on the bus.

160. Jo? Oh, yes, we're not in the bus (4)

161. Jo O.K. ready ?

162. Je I'm phoning you.

163. Jo Hello.

164. Je I'm on the bus. Im coming to your house. (Je and Jo on phone.)

165. Mi No, it's to E's house.

166. Je I'm coming to E's house.

167. Jo Oh, ah, we are having some birthday. It's E's birthday.

168. Je Oh, good. ?

169. Jo Sure, O.K., bye.

170. Je ? , O.K., bye ? (3)

171. Jo I'm a policeman. (Jo in house, tries on two hats, Mi rocks 'baby' in arms, E dials.)

172. Mi Me, too.

173. Jo Yeah, pretend we're all together?

174. Mi Can you hold the baby? (to He) I can't hold her. I'm a policeman. You have to hold the baby.

175. Jo Where's my baby?

176. Je Can I make, can I play with the ?

177. Mi And who's going to be the husband of you? Who me? Jo, or E? Who? Who's going to be the husband of you, Je?

178. Jo What do you want, E, anyway. (E and Jo on telephone)

179. E I'm calling, I'm calling Je.

180. Jo What?

181. E I calling Je.

182. Jo Yes, I'm at your place, how you ? (Jo hangs up.) She's in

my place.

183. Je (Laughs) ?

184. Jo I'm in your office. We're together 'cos we have this same hat (to Mi).

185. Jo Yep, I have glasses.

186. Mi I don't need glasses, anyway, we don't really need glasses, right?

187. E Huh?

188. Mi We don't really need glasses anyway. We're not really, we're not really blind. (2)

189. Jo I want this one. (E and Jo pick up glasses.)

190. Mi Where's the office?

191. E I'm there now, there now, I'm here now. (Laughs.)

192. Jo O.K., hands up. I'm a policeman.

193. Mi And I'm a policeman, too.

194. E (Gun noises) I'm a bad guy. Choo, choo, choo...(gun noises).

195. Ri You guys, you guys, you guys! (from adjacent centre) You're not allowed to play guns (gun noises). You're not allowed to play guns.

196. ? E, ?

197. Jo Don't look at us, we're not looking at you and you're looking at us.

198. Ri And I know you're ? guns. E, guns. [You're not allowed to play guns.

199. Mi [E' don't play guns!

200. Jo? We're just a policeman. We don't have any guns ? (2)

201. E I'm here now.

202. Mi You have, go outside, go outside. You ring the door bell. Ding, dong.

203. E Ding, dong, ding.

204. Mi Open, oh, he's in the next room.

205. Jo O.K. We're having a birthday. Here's our cake. Here's our cake. Oh, put baby down. We're having some party, man.

206. Je (laughs)

207. Jo Oh, yeah, man. (2) (M throws 'baby' into a corner.) Shut up that noise, man. (all giggle)

208. Je Sounds like, sounds like, sounds like Mr. T. talking.

209. Jo Yeah, man.

210. Je (laughs)

211. E ? man.

212. Jo Oh, yeah, man. Shut up yourself, man.

213. Mi Shush, shush, the teacher. I'll have this bowl.

214. E I'll have this bowl (takes M's bowl)

215. Mi I'll have this bowl. (E distributes bowls to table)

216. Je I get the pink one. I want a pink one please.

217. E Pink one. (2) (Je and M fight over bowls)

218. Mi? That's enough cake!

219. Je That's for the baby! Here, baby, baby sits here. (Picks

up stuffed animal.)

220. Jo Need some more, man. Come here, man. Hey man, shut up man! O.K. Who wants to eat like this? ( )

221. E There's nothing to eat. ?

222. Jo Never mind. Who's this going to be for? (5) (Distributes bowls.)

223. Mi Je, don't look behind you.

224. Jo Oh yeah, man.

225. E Oh yeah, man.

226. Jo I gotta talks like Mr. T. O.K. man ? man.

227. E (laughs) Finished (4) (Empties bowl into mouth.)

228. Je I ate that one (3)

229. Jo O.K. I'm going home. Let's go, Je, let's go.

230. Je Let's get the baby.

231. Mi Let's take the baby.

232. Jo O.K. Goodbye, E. Maybe tomorrow. I'll come again, O.K., E? O.K. E? O.K., Let's go home. Let's go bus.

233. Mi O.K., here's the bus, (Jo, M, Je get on bus. E clears table.)

234. Jo Here's the bus.

235. Je Here's the bus. I already got on. (14)

236. Jo? O.K., let's go.

237. Mi O.K., the bus is ready (?)

238. ? Let's go, the bus is ready (?)

239. ? O.K., bus is going.

240. Jo Bye, Je ?

241. Je I'm at home.

242. Mi I'm at home.

243. Jo I'm going to sleep.

244. Je Me too. (4)

245. Mi Wasn't that a good party?

246. Je Yes, I'm going to sleep now. (7)

247. E (E dials) (6) B-ring

248. Jo Hey! Yike! You scared me. You scared me. (Mi picks up phone.)

249. Mi Hi, who's this? E?

250. Je 'Scuse me ? (Jo moves to E at phone)

251. Mi Bye, E.

252. Jo You scared me. You just scared me. (3) (Jo, Me and Mi go to sleep.)

253. Je Go to sleep. (4)

254. Jo Get off the baby on the floor.

255. Mi O.K. bye guys. We can have a bad guy ?. Bye guys.

256. Je Bye guys.

257. Mi You're not going nowhere. I am. (Mi gets up, walks, snores, falls back down.

258. Jo Look at this.

259. Mi ? Bye guys ?. (Jo goes to phone)

260. Jo How do you like my glasses? How do you like my glasses ? glasses?

261. E Hi (on phone) ?

262. Jo Ah, can you come to our house?

263. E Yes.

264. Jo O.K., bye (12) (E and Jo leave centre. Je and Mi in house. Mi looks around in puzzlement.) (Picture off briefly.)

265. Jo W at's for dinner today, man! (Mr. T voice)

266. E We're having a, we're having a dinner.

267. Jo Dinner, man, dinner, where's the dinner, man ?

268. E I'm cooking ?. Now you sit down and wait there for the dinner.

269. Jo Sure, man. I'm Mr. T, man. (Jo sits down, pull out chair macho style and falls into it.)

270. Mi Me, too. (Mr. T. voice)

271. Jo No, you can't speak like this. That's ? (normal voice) Man, man (Mr. T voice)

272. Mi I'm not drinking. I'm not drinking.

273. E No, eat up, its ice cream.

274. Jo Ice cream?

275. E Yes.

276. Jo Ice cream in a cup, how. Hey, man, this (E giggles) Hey, man, ice cream stuck. Ice cream stuck.

277. Mi My ice cream stuck.

278. Jo Ice cream stuck, man ?

279. Je (giggles) Ding, dong. (3) (E goes to 'door' and 'opens'

it.)

280. Jo I'm sleeping in your bed. (3) 'Scuse me, man.

281. E O.K., man. What are you doing, man? ? (E and Jo move to store. Jo plays the clown to E's giggles.)

282. Jo O.K., man, what's so funny, man? What's so, what's so funny, man?

283. E What's so funny, man?

284. Jo O.K. man, hands up, hands up.

285. E Hands up yourself. Put your hands up.

286. Jo O.K., goodbye. I'm going now. ? (Gun noises, E giggles.) I need the hose (?) or heavy knife. ? (inaudible passage)

287. Je You're all alone and I'm just ? (8) (Jo dials)

288. Jo Hi E, man.

289. E You're a bat man.

290. Jo I'm not a bat man. I'm Mr. T, man. (3)

291. Mi Ding-a-ling-a-ling (3)

292. E Hello.

293. Mi Hello.

294. E Hello, man. Goodbye.

295. Je I'm in E's house.

296. Jo? I'm in my house ?. This is E's house.

297. Je You can come in my house I'm in my house, too.

298. Jo This is my house, not your house.

299. Je E's house?